

blm - alaska

frontiers

Issue 10 May 1988

Outdoor Week Breaks Out

Willows are budding. The sweet smell of alder is in the air and hundreds of Anchorage area sixth graders will be heading for BLM's Campbell Tract to learn about the natural world.

Alaska Outdoor Week, the environmental education program sponsored by the Anchorage District in cooperation with the local school officials, is set for May 23-27. Each day throughout the week, teachers and their classes will investigate various aspects of nature with the help of natural resource professionals.

Van Waggoner, BLM wildlife biologist, coordinates the event, which is in its 14th year. To prepare for the students, he lays out four trails on the wooded administrative site in south Anchorage and assigns a place to instructors who will work with the students.

"This year's program will include learning stations on forestry, water quality, wildlife habitat, soils analysis and map and compass skills," says Waggoner. "In addition we will have several archaeologists operating a mock archaeological dig and another station on gold panning techniques."

Assisting the BLM to instruct will be specialists from the Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, National Weather Service, Minerals Management Service, Soil Conservation Service, Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Mines, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Geological Survey and Campfire.



More than 1,500 sixth graders will pan for gold and learn about water quality, plant ecology, weather and land use planning.

Waggoner says this year private schools will be invited to participate as well.

Outdoor Week is aimed at providing students with the opportunity to learn about scientific principles as they exist in nature. Emma Walton, science consultant for the Anchorage School District, says students learn better when they experience a principle or concept as it actually applies. "Searching for edible plants and learning how to identify them by the size and shape of their leaves before

they taste them is a learning activity that involves all the senses," she says.

For teachers the program combines a wonderful field trip with some valuable assistance from professionals in other fields. Diane Stone, teacher at Spring Hill School, has been bringing her classes to Outdoor Week for several years.

"I might be able to teach a lesson on soils, but know very little about weather. This program brings experts from the agencies who know the topic inside and out," says Stone. -JS

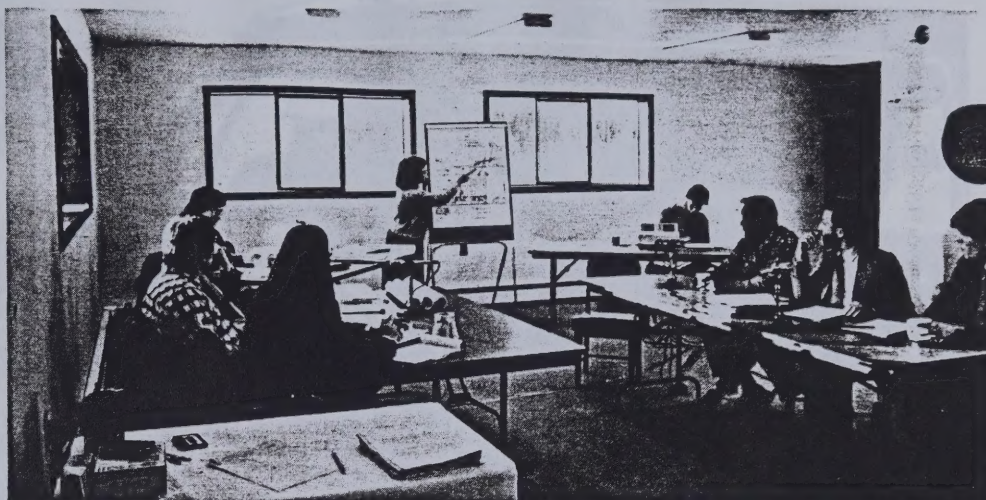
Hearings on native allotments underway throughout state

Who owns the land? Of course, the answer is, "the owner is the one who holds the patent." But an unusual set of circumstances has now cast a cloud on the ownership of approximately 1,400 parcels of land that were patented to the State, Native Corporations or private individuals. The parcels are Native allotment applications related to the Aguilar court decision of 1979. They are up to 160 acres each and are scattered throughout the State.

BLM hearings officers will decide the validity of the Native allotment claims in question after a series of informal hearings now being conducted in Kenai, Klukwan and elsewhere.

Native allotments were authorized by the 1906 Indian Allotment Act, which permitted the Secretary of the Interior to grant title to 160 acres of land to Alaska Natives who could show substantially continuous use during a five-year period for traditional activities such as hunting, fishing or berry picking.

During the first 54 years of the Act, only 51 applications were submitted. But in the early 1970's when it became



The first native allotment hearing was held in Kenai March 1.

obvious that Congress was going to settle the Alaska land claims issue, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Rural CAP made a concerted effort to help Natives file allotment applications for the lands they used. A total of 9,310 cases were filed by the time the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was passed in 1971 and repealed the Native Allotment Act.

In processing Native allotment applications, the BIA returned any application for lands that were already patented to the State or other parties. But Ethel Aguilar and others objected. They took the matter to court and won. In 1979 the court ruled that in such cases, the BLM should examine the application and seek title recovery from the current owner in those cases where the applicant's claim was determined to be valid. With this ruling, all the returned applications

were reinstated.

Fortunately, many times the parties involved can reach a settlement. "This is easiest when the State of Alaska still owns the land and there isn't any development on it," said Robert Arndorfer, BLM's deputy state director for conveyance management.

"In 1984, the State received authorization to return the land to us and we could then approve the Native's application if it was found to be otherwise valid." Arndorfer says that things get complicated where the State has sold the land to third party interests who then may have built homes or other structures. "Still other cases on the North Slope involve land that has been leased for energy exploration," he added. One case on the Kenai River involves a parcel that has been subdivided into 17 small parcels.

When BLM makes an initial determination that the allotment application is invalid, the applicant has the opportunity to have an informal hearing. New information can be presented, but the burden of proof is on the applicant. The applicants are represented by attorneys from Alaska Legal Services. Witnesses can testify on either side of the case and can be cross-examined.

BLMer Sue McWilliams says that it could take BLM up to six months after a hearing is concluded to make a final determination in a case. If BLM finds in favor of the applicant, additional negotiation to secure an equitable settlement will be attempted. -EB



BLM hearing examiner Sue McWilliams discusses the hearing during a recess.



READY TO ASSIST THE PUBLIC — BLM Ranger Randy Tracy answers questions for a visitor planning a trip to the White Mountains National Recreation Area. Tracy will spend most of his time in the field, helping people when necessary and providing a uniformed presence that will deter misuse of the public lands.

BLM ranger helps campers

If you're driving the remote, dusty roads of northern Alaska this summer and your tire goes flat, don't be surprised if the man who stops to help you is wearing a Bureau of Land Management uniform and driving a pickup with a BLM insignia. If you observe vandals destroying public signs or picnic tables in a BLM campground, you can report them to the same man — the BLM ranger in Fairbanks.

Randy Tracy, Alaska's first uniformed BLM ranger, is assigned to the Steese/White Mountains District. He will carry extra gas for stranded motorists, help with flat tires, answer questions, educate people on the appropriate care of the lands and their resources, and provide information about the sites they visit.

"We expect our ranger to be highly visible in the field, and to help the public," BLM Associate State Director Les Rosenkrance said. "I expect his office to be his official truck, not a

room in an office building."

The ranger will also help the district resource specialists clear recreation trails and check the use and condition of public recreation cabins. In short, he will be a jack-of-all-trades. "And at the same time, his presence in the area as a uniformed officer will help deter misuse of public land," added Steese/White Mountains District Manager Don Runberg.

Tracy became a hero to Fairbanks resident Mary Vilandre and her children when they were stranded in her car during a Fairbanks cold spell last December. While she worried about her children's safety and the possible expense of a tow truck, countless unconcerned motorists passed by. Finally Tracy stopped to help. Instead of calling a tow truck, he got the engine running again and, to make sure she arrived home safely, followed her cranky car to her residence, five miles away. Vilandre was surprised to learn

that Tracy was the only BLM ranger in northern Alaska.

Her faith in human nature restored, Vilandre dubbed him "The Lone Ranger." She wrote an account of the incident in the January issue of the *Pow Wow Trail News*, saying, "When there's an element of danger, a BLM ranger can come riding into your life — not just in fairy tales, either."

As the lone ranger of northern Alaska, Tracy believes wholeheartedly that police work is a people business. "I feel that if you treat people decently and explain the situation fully, you will always have their respect and cooperation," he said. He added that "the most effective part of law enforcement is helping people and building their trust in the uniform."

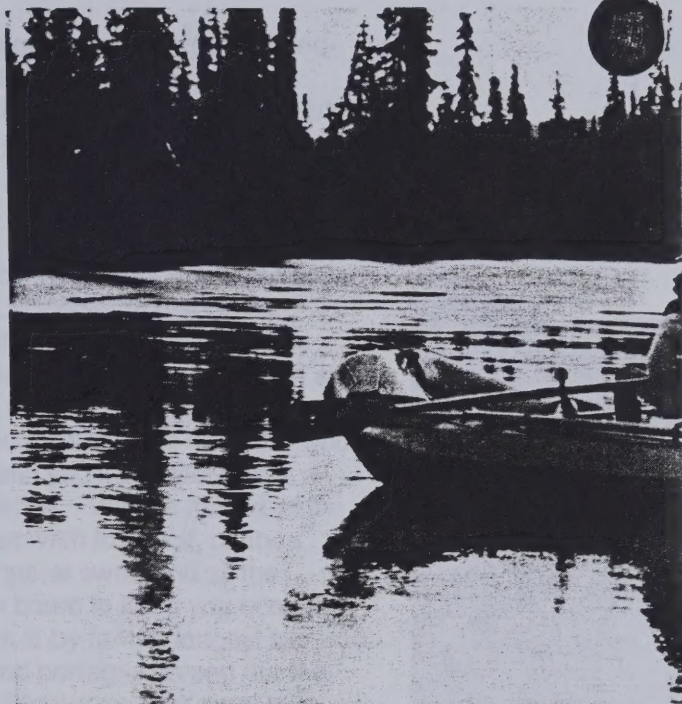
If you need to contact the BLM ranger in northern Alaska, call 356-5367.

-SDW

Easy access makes Gulkana BLM's most

Two wolves, oblivious to your presence, search the beachline for tasty tidbits. Six bald eagles soar slowly overhead while a proud pair of trumpeter swans parade seven cygnets across the placid pond. Meanwhile several otters catch grayling with ease—the same grayling that ignored your lures all morning. Later your canoe bottom resonates with the “thawumps” of twenty or more king salmon rapidly heading upstream to their destiny. These are just some of the possibilities you may experience on a trip down the Gulkana—one of six BLM-administered components of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System in Alaska.

The Gulkana system is located in Southcentral Alaska between the Denali and Richardson Highways. It is one of a handful of rivers with easy road access at the put-in and take-out points. Best of all, there are three different routes that offer a variety of whitewater challenges, great fishing and solitude.



Main Stem

The most popular trip is down the main stem of the Gulkana from Paxson Lake to Sourdough Campground. This 45-mile trip can be made in three to five days.

A 300-foot portage from the parking lot to Paxson Lake gets you on your way. After an hour of paddling, you reach the lake outlet, and the Gulkana adventure begins. The

river descends at 20 feet per mile and the small rocky rapids and continuous fast water keep you alert. It's not too difficult, but challenging enough to wake anyone who's lounging. Along the riverbank, several old cabins with sod roofs and sagging walls pass by quickly. After the Middle Fork Junction, the river becomes deep and quiet as it meanders lazily through spruce forests.

Later in the trip, Canyon Rapids challenges the most skilled paddlers. This Class III rapids becomes even more difficult at high water and many a canoe has been crushed here. A portage allows for safe passage. As the current quickens below the rapids, the river drops 50 feet per mile for the next eight miles before turning quiet for the final mile stretch to the Sourdough Campground on the Richardson Highway.

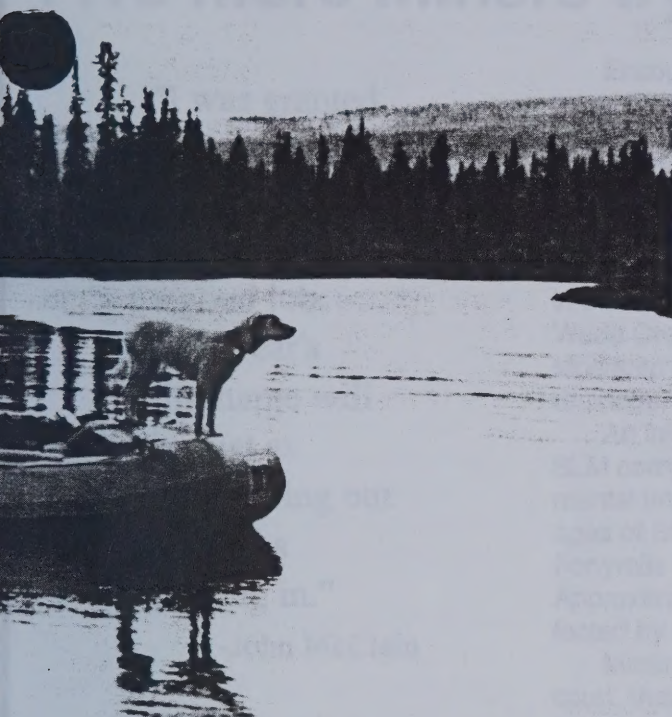
Middle Fork

The Middle Fork trip originates at Tangle Lakes on the Denali Highway. Several portages bring you to Dickey Lake. If you want to save some time, you can charter a plane to the lake or you can take the Swede Lake Trail to Swede Lake. This trail is most suited to small ATV vehicles and can be very muddy. It will bring you to a point about six miles downstream from Dickey Lake.

Jeff Shryer, BLM's Glennallen district biologist has this to say about the Middle Fork. “The first three miles is an easy float through a beautiful valley where the trout fishing is great. But then the river abruptly drains into a steep



popular river



anyon. The water moves very fast and there is no room for maneuvering. I wouldn't take a canoe down this route; the numerous rocks means there is no clear channel and it's really easy to bang up a canoe. Kayaks and rafts will fare much better as it is inevitable that you will hit something here.

"After the canyon the river enters another valley and becomes slow moving. But watch for sweepers and sleepers. The water depth increases and there is plenty of room to maneuver. Along the Middle Fork, you can expect to

see grizzly bear, wolves, bald eagle and beaver," concluded Shryer.

Allow four to five days for the Middle Fork trip to Sourdough Campground.

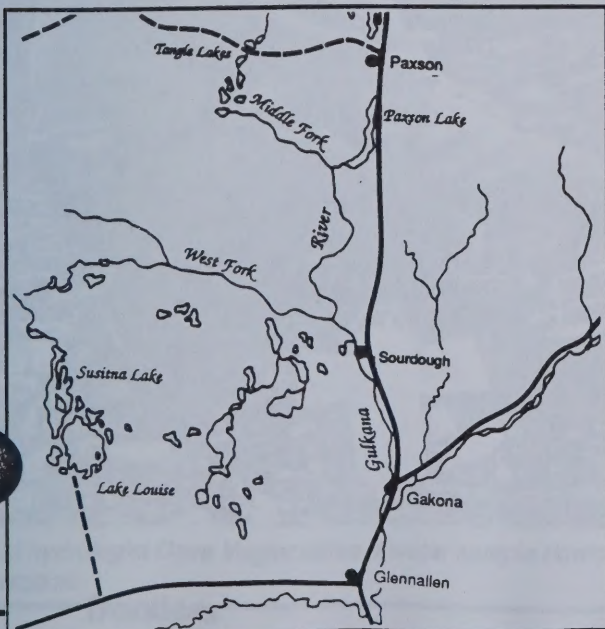
West Fork

"I think I like the West Fork the best," says Wayne Boden, BLM's chief of resources. Boden has been floating the Gulkana since 1965 and has seen most, but not all, of the area at least once. He says, "This segment is the most isolated. You probably will have the whole place to yourself and you'll definitely have a wilderness experience. Wildlife habitat at the upper end is superb with fox, wolf, caribou, bear, moose, trumpeter swan and all the waterfowl you can count to keep you occupied."

The West Fork is by far the longest trip—10 to 20 days. Several portages screen out the novice travelers. "You're on your own up in there on this one. You must be truly self-sufficient and prepared. Alaska is a very unforgiving place. If you make a mistake, it can kill you," he added with a nod.

Regardless of which trip you decide to take, you will eventually wind up on the lower end of the main stem. Here you may encounter a small fleet of motorized craft, probably carrying an army of fishermen on their way to a favorite campsite where they try their luck on the thousands of spawning kings and silvers. Use is highest on the summer weekends and the congestion can be a shock after enjoying the solitude of the upper river. Nevertheless, memories of the adventures of either trip with your friends will undoubtedly remain with you for years to come.

-EB



GULKANA MINI GUIDE

Put-In

Gulkana River: Paxson Lake
Middle Fork Gulkana: Tangle Lakes or Swede Lake Trail
West Fork Gulkana: Lake Louise

Take Out

All trips: Sourdough Campground

Trip Length

Gulkana River: 4-5 days
Middle Fork Gulkana: 4-5 days
West Fork Gulkana: 10-20 days

Best Time to Go

June to early September

For Detailed Information

Bureau of Land Management
Glennallen District Office
Box 42
Glennallen, Alaska 99588
(907) 822-3217

Five more miners try for okay to mine

"I was granted the permit because I had been doing a good job. . . . This year's discharge will be just as clean going out as it was coming in."

-John McClain

Encouraged by one miner's success, five more placer gold mining operators are seeking a federal judge's permission to mine this summer.

The mining operations are located on Faith Creek and the Tolovana River in the Minto Flats watershed; and Wade Creek, the South Fork and Mosquito Fork in the Fortymile River drainage.

An injunction halted mining until BLM completes cumulative environmental impact statements on drainages of Birch and Beaver Creeks, the Fortymile River and Minto Flats. Approximately 40 miners were affected by the injunction.

Miner John McClain proved to the court that his operation on Faith Creek, 74 miles northeast of Fairbanks, wouldn't contribute to cumu-

lative environmental impacts on the Minto Flats watershed.

The Sierra Club, initiator of the law suit against BLM, didn't oppose McClain's application.

"I applied," McClain said, "because my operation brings in around \$500,000 per season and supports six families. I didn't want to see them out of work. But I was granted the permit because I had been doing a good job in previous years.

My operation passed all the tests last year, so with the new, 100-percent water recycling system I'm installing, this year's discharge will be just as clean going out as it was coming in."

In applying for permission to operate, the miners must prove to the court that they will not be contributing to court-identified impacts on the watershed, such as degradation of the water downstream of the operation.

McClain worked with the Bureau of Land Management and several State agencies to complete his application to the court. The Steese/White Mountains District staff also prepared an environmental assessment for McClain's proposal. "They gave me a lot of help during the process," McClain said. "In my book you can't beat the quality of BLM employees in Fairbanks."

The court injunction affected approximately 40 miners working under BLM plans of operation. In Alaska, these are required if a miner plans to disturb five acres or more, or if their operations are located in the corridor of a national wild and scenic river or in an area of critical environmental concern.

The environmental assessment on McClain's operation analyzed the impacts of his proposed actions on the environment in and near the area he was mining. A similar assessment must be completed and submitted to the court for every application.

If the waivers are granted, these miners could operate during the 1988 season despite the closure. -SDW



BLM hydrologist Dave Vogler takes a water sample downstream from an active placer operation.

Fire plans save men, money and resources

On a hot summer afternoon thunderclouds build overhead. The skies darken, and soon lightning flashes. A bolt hits the ground. A tussock of grass smolders, then bursts into flame. Another Alaska wildfire has started.

At Fairbanks a dispatcher in the Alaska Interagency Fire Coordination Center watches her computer mark lightning strikes on a map on the screen.

She dispatches a detection plane to search the area.

What fire managers do about this particular fire will depend on a set of guidelines in interagency fire management plans. These plans cover virtually all land in the state. Before these plans existed, fire fighters responded immediately to all wildfires and fought every fire until it was out.

The old approach did not justify the expense. Furthermore, some fires actually benefit the land by removing built-up organic matter which insulates the ground, by clearing out trees so grasses and shrubs can grow, and by depositing nutrient-rich ash.

The plants that grow immediately after a fire provide better browse for animals, from the tiny vole to the gigantic moose. This in turn benefits predators who feed on the browsers.

In 1978 a group of land managers from federal, state and Native agencies formed a task force to find ways of reducing the high cost of fighting wildfires. We needed to answer the question: What is the best way to handle fires?" said Tom Frey, manager of the Fire Coordination Center.

Obviously, priorities needed to be set for which fires would be attacked first. The resulting system assigned one of four possible "protection statuses" to all land in the state. By 1986, plans had been completed for almost all land in the state.

Back at the fire coordination center, the team on the detection plane radios in:



A fire in a limited protection area north of Fairbanks in the White Mountains.

they have found a 5-acre fire. They report the coordinates in latitude and longitude.

The dispatcher calls up a map of the area on her computer screen. Her first task is to find what the designated protection status is for the area where the fire has been reported.

A designation of "critical" means there is human habitation nearby. Such a fire will be attacked immediately and every effort will be made to put it out.

If the area is designated "full," there is no human habitation but there are significant resources at risk, and the attached procedure is the same.

However, a critical fire would be given priority over a full fire if manpower were limited.

"Modified" protection status applies to areas where fires will be fought if fire fighters are available and if it is during the most fire-prone time, early summer. Later in the summer these areas convert to a "limited" protection status.

Fires in limited areas are monitored and allowed to burn unless they threaten higher priority areas. Any of these designations can change if severe weather conditions, either wet or dry, warrant it.

When fire managers know beforehand what action to take, there is no delay in taking that action.

The map shows that the fire is in a limited protection area. It will be monitored from the air and not suppressed unless it threatens to expand into an area of higher protection status.

In the meantime, other fires have started, and the people who might have been fighting this fire are available to fight them.

Tom Frey sums it up. "In the past we used a shotgun approach. Fire management plans have allowed us to concentrate suppression forces in areas that have the highest priority. This is a more efficient use of the forces."

-SM

The Beaver Creek draft EIS will be the first of the four court-ordered documents to hit the streets over the next few months as BLM works to meet its commitment to address the cumulative impacts of placer mining and present a recommendation to the judge in time for miners to operate in 1989. The EIS is to be distributed in late April.

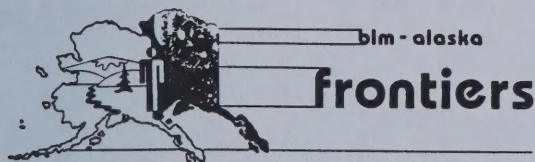
Arctic District staff visited North Slope village schools in March to recruit applicants for this summer's Resource Apprenticeship Program for Students, or RAPS. BLM will employ 10 students in the program, which started last year as a cooperative effort with the BIA.

A recently published BLM technical report is attracting considerable interest. It is entitled **A Statistical Analysis and Summary of Radar-Interpreted Arctic Lake Depths, Technical Report No. 11**. The report describes how 1.6 and 4 meter isobaths were interpreted from Side Looking Airborne Radar images on 20,000 Alaskan North Slope lakes. Single copies of the twelve maps that depict the radar-interpreted depths are also available while the supply lasts from Jack C. Mellor, Bureau of Land Management, Arctic District Office, 1541 Gaffney Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99703.

BLM is expected to complete a draft management plan early in May for two **Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC's)** in the Ray Mountains. A small herd of caribou inhabits these mountains, which are 15 miles north of the village of Tanana and 30 miles west of the Dalton Highway. The ACEC's were designated to reduce disturbance to the caribou and their calving areas in case development occurs in the Ray Mountains.

The draft plan will be subject to public comment for 30 days after it is published. To receive a copy write the Bureau of Land Management, Public Affairs Office, 1541 Gaffney Road, Fairbanks, Alaska 99703, or phone (907) 356-5307.

Bureau of Land Management



Return if not delivered in 10 days

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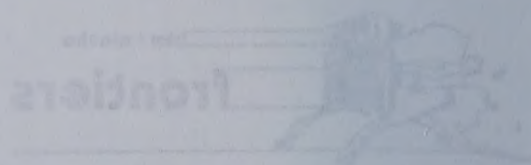
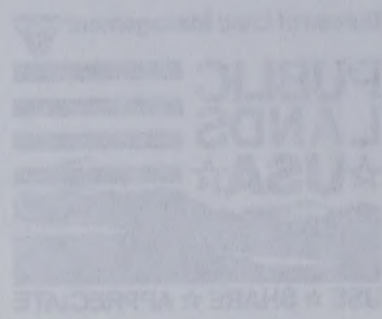
BLM is expected to complete a draft management plan early in May for the Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) in the Ray Mountains. A small number of carbon sequestration projects have been identified in the area north of the village of Tarns and 30 miles west of the Dalton Highway. The ACECs were designed to reduce disturbance to the carbon and thus carbon sequestration in the Ray Mountains. The draft plan will be subject to public comment for 30 days after it is published. To receive a copy, write to Bureau of Land Management, P.O. Box 25047, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701 or phone (907) 325-2207.

A recently published BLM fact sheet report is entitled "Consider the Future: A Guide to the Biological Analysis and Assessment of Federal Lands." The report is a guide to the many of the biological resources of the BLM. The report is available in English and Spanish. The report is available in English and Spanish. The report is available in English and Spanish.

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The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the first of the four court-ordered districts to file the proposed plan for the next few months. The BLM is expected to meet the court-ordered deadline to address the court-ordered plan for the next few months. The BLM is expected to meet the court-ordered deadline to address the court-ordered plan for the next few months.

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Frontiers is a national organization that works to protect public lands and resources. The organization is dedicated to the protection of public lands and resources. The organization is dedicated to the protection of public lands and resources.